

How does social  
class affect life  
chances?



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## LIFE CHANCES

SOCIAL CLASS CONTINUES TO HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON LIFE CHANCES OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE CONTEMPORARY UK. DISCUSS THIS VIEW, USING APPROPRIATE EVIDENCE.

In a modern western society individuals strive to achieve the things that are labelled as desirable, the best phone, a big house and a nice car. These are all known as commodities alongside education, health and housing but these commodities are very rarely distributed equally and so actually achieving these things can be difficult (Stroud, 2001). The ability and opportunity a person has to achieve these commodities is known as a person's life chances. There are various factors that can determine a person's life chances including genetic inheritance, social class of parents, education, childhood poverty, family, attitudes and discrimination, plus many more (Aldridge, 2004). A person's life chances will often be determined by their social class within their society. Social class is one of the oldest and possibly one of the most persistent inequalities in British society. Classes are groups of people that all share the same ideals, opportunities and cultural beliefs. These class systems can be defined by achieved or ascribed status. Achieved status is status that has been worked for, whereas ascribed status is from birth. Some class systems have social mobility, which gives individuals the opportunity to move up or down classes.

Throughout history there have been records of many different class systems, including slavery, the feudal system and the Hindu caste system. Some of these class systems still exist even in today's modernised world. Despite

many adaptations taking place as life continues to change according to the National Equality Panel the UK is still a long way from being a society of equal opportunity. There has been a lot of change over the last two decades that have indeed improved the life chances of many; these changes have narrowed the inequalities in earnings, gender and education for ethnic minorities (Timmins, 2010). The biggest inequality that can be seen within the UK would be with income, with the majority of the UK's wealth being owned by only a small percentage.

Within the contemporary UK there appears to be a class system divided into three categories, upper class, middle class and working class. For each of these three classes there will be differences in the kind of advantages or disadvantages the people within them can have. These differences may be recognised by obvious inequality with commodities such as council housing or privately owned housing in select locations, education at select schools compared to state education, private healthcare opposed to NHS healthcare and highly paid occupations against poorly paid or no occupation opportunities. There could also be disadvantages due to a person's accent and dialect, appearance and clothing and the leisure activities that person indulges in. There may also be other less obvious inequalities, from social class, that can affect a person's life chances.

In a modern society social class and life chances depend largely on economic differences between groups, such as wealth and income, possession of goods, and a person's position in society (SFEU, n. d). The biggest differences in social class within the UK can be seen through a person's occupation. The upper classes can live off unearned income, such as land

<https://assignbuster.com/how-does-social-class-affect-life-chances/>

rents or inheritance. There are not many upper class people living off unearned income, despite there being some very wealthy people. In the UK most people fall into middle class or working class categories. The middle class is broken down into the higher middle class and the lower middle class. The higher middle class hold occupations in professional work such as law, medicine or owning businesses. This type of work requires education, qualifications and skills. While the lower middle class hold occupations such as teachers and opticians. At one time lower middle class occupations were sought after and would have been regarded as higher middle class, but due to these professions now being stable well paid positions they have decreased in class standing (Mills, 1956, cited in Anon, n. d). Working classes hold manual labour occupations and although this can often require a lot of skill it is not generally well paid (Anon, n. d).

It is more than obvious to say that if a child has a good education and achieves high qualifications then that child is most likely to gain a high paying job. A person born into a family living in poverty would obviously not have the same opportunity to attend a top quality private school as a person born into a wealthy family. There is also the consideration of catchment areas with education that could prevent a person being able to attend a better school than provided in their local area. A lot of the best schools in the UK do have scholarship and bursary opportunities, however these do not always apply as some of the individuals from poorer societies are unable or unaware of how to apply for this assistance and if they do they could still be refused. For instance, a child from a council estate, living with unemployed parents on the outskirts of a city would not be able to go to a private funded

school in a big city. Whereas a child with parents as actors will almost always be instantly enrolled to the best private schools available.

The main factor that affects health inequality in the UK is social class. There are many studies that show people born in to poor families have less chance of survival, grow up with poor health and may die at an early age. NHS waiting lists at an all time high, those individuals with either low incomes or no incomes are increasingly waiting longer for potentially lifesaving treatment. In contrast to this those people in what is considered the upper classes are able to pay to have treatment privately and almost immediately, also having the opportunity to choose the best surgeon/doctor to perform the treatment. There is also the fact that many working class occupations cause illness but the people suffering are unable to take time away from their employment for fear of dismissal. Health inequalities may not be directly caused by social class itself but more as a result of social class inequality. Poor health can be a result of poor living conditions, bad eating habits, behavioural habits such as smoking and drinking and lack of exercise (Macintyre, cited in Burton, 2014).

Another difference between life chances and differing social classes is the way crime is handled. A lot of national statistics state that most crime is committed by working class males. This is not necessarily true as a lot of wealthy people often commit crimes but are not prosecuted. Even when they are prosecuted there are major differences in the treatment involved. For instance a white working class male arrested for fraud will find himself face down on the pavement and handcuffed behind his back. He will then be taken to a local police station, thrown in a cell and eventually interviewed for

<https://assignbuster.com/how-does-social-class-affect-life-chances/>

hours before having DNA, fingerprints and photographs taken before being released. In total contrast to this a wealthy public figure such as a politician or celebrity would be contacted through their PA or agent with a request to attend the police station at a time suitable and convenient for them. They will not be handcuffed, put in a cell or subjected to many hours of interrogation. They may have to provide DNA, fingerprints and photographs but this could also depend on the person in question.

## REFERENCES

Aldridge, S. (2004) *Life Chances & Social Mobility: An Overview of the Evidence* [online]. Available from: [http://www.swslim.org.uk/documents/themes/lt10\\_lifechances\\_socialmobility.pdf](http://www.swslim.org.uk/documents/themes/lt10_lifechances_socialmobility.pdf) [Accessed on: 25<sup>th</sup>

February 2014].

Anon. (n. d) *Social Inequality Class War* [online]. Available from: [https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=4&ved=0CE4QFjAD&url=https%3A%2F%2Fhwb.wales.gov.uk%2Fcms%2Fhwbcontent%2FShared%2520Documents%2Fvtc%2F2009-10%2Fsociology%2Fj-griffiths-a2%2F08%2520Class%2520inequality.doc&ei=cwUNU9qYGoLC7AaH0YGADQ&usg=AFQjCNHztbBO4TkYV-B6XSNIwk\\_jZoTLiA&sig2=Jpwtqz8c6wbtXevFwkpBw&bvm=bv.61725948,d.ZGU&cad=rja](https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=4&ved=0CE4QFjAD&url=https%3A%2F%2Fhwb.wales.gov.uk%2Fcms%2Fhwbcontent%2FShared%2520Documents%2Fvtc%2F2009-10%2Fsociology%2Fj-griffiths-a2%2F08%2520Class%2520inequality.doc&ei=cwUNU9qYGoLC7AaH0YGADQ&usg=AFQjCNHztbBO4TkYV-B6XSNIwk_jZoTLiA&sig2=Jpwtqz8c6wbtXevFwkpBw&bvm=bv.61725948,d.ZGU&cad=rja) [Accessed on: 25<sup>th</sup> February 2014].

Burton, J. (2013) *Class and Stratification Access Sociology* [Class Hand-out]. Access to Social Science: Life Chances, Northampton College. 1<sup>st</sup> March.

<https://assignbuster.com/how-does-social-class-affect-life-chances/>

Crossman, A. (n. d) *Sociology of Social Inequality* [online]. Available from: <http://sociology.about.com/od/Disciplines/a/Sociology-Of-Social-Inequality.htm>[Accessed on: 27<sup>th</sup> February 2014].

Scottish Further Education Unit. (n. d) *Sociology Social Stratification Intermediate ½* [online]. Available from: [https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=5&ved=0CFYQFjAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.educationscotland.gov.uk%2FImages%2FSocialStratInt12\\_tcm4-335917.doc&ei=cwUNU9qYGoLC7AaH0YGADQ&usg=AFQjCNFy43tMDIvoc1psuuKEX06umWxxgQ&sig2=5IS1A\\_bga4yStmZ-aZ4NxA&bvm=bv.61725948,d.ZGU&cad=rja](https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=5&ved=0CFYQFjAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.educationscotland.gov.uk%2FImages%2FSocialStratInt12_tcm4-335917.doc&ei=cwUNU9qYGoLC7AaH0YGADQ&usg=AFQjCNFy43tMDIvoc1psuuKEX06umWxxgQ&sig2=5IS1A_bga4yStmZ-aZ4NxA&bvm=bv.61725948,d.ZGU&cad=rja)[Accessed on: 25<sup>th</sup> February 2014].

Sparknotes. (n. d) *Social Stratification and Inequality. Modern Stratification Systems* [online]. Available from: <http://www.sparknotes.com/sociology/social-stratification-and-inequality/section3.rhtml>[Accessed on: 27<sup>th</sup> February 2014].

Stroud, A. (2001) *How Social Class Affects Life Chances* [online]. Available from: <http://www.markedbyteachers.com/gcse/sociology/how-social-class-affects-life-chances.html>[Accessed on: 27<sup>th</sup> February 2014].

Timmins, N. (2010) *Social advantages still shape life chances* [online]. Available from: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/72110f9e-0ab1-11df-b35f-00144feabdc0.html> - axzz2ujHY6eXs[Accessed on: 1<sup>st</sup> March 2014].

<https://assignbuster.com/how-does-social-class-affect-life-chances/>

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Angel, L. (2007) *Sociology (Analyse the relationship between social class and life chances)?* [online]. Available from: <http://uk.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20070121091107AADtIDM>[Accessed on: 27<sup>th</sup> February 2014].

com/question/index?qid=20070121091107AADtIDM[Accessed on: 27<sup>th</sup> February 2014].

Bancroft, A. & Rogers, S. (2010) *Introduction to Sociology. Max Weber - Class, Status and Power* [online]. Available from: <http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/undergraduate/introsoc/weber11.html>[Accessed on: 27<sup>th</sup> February 2014].

Rafaelz5. (2008) *Does social class still influence people's life chances and lifestyle?* [online] Available from: <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080810055743AA8X0wM>[Accessed on: 27<sup>th</sup> February 2014].

S-cool. (n. d) *Class* [online]. Available from: <http://www.s-cool.co.uk/a-level/sociology/inequalities/revise-it/class>[Accessed on: 1<sup>st</sup> March 2014].